

La Pietra
Walter F. Dillingham House
Poni Moi Road, Diamond Head
Honolulu
Honolulu County
Hawaii

HABS No. HI-30

*HABS
HI,
2-HONLV,
15-*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LA PIETRA (WALTER F. DILLINGHAM HOUSE)

HABS No. HI-30

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HI,
2-HONOLU,
15-

Location:

End of Poni Moi Road, Diamond Head, just above Kapiolani Park, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Present Owner:

Punahou School by bequest. Reportedly, the property is now subject to a purchase option by Bert Williams, developer.

Present Occupants:

Several faculty families of Punahou School.

Present Use:

Temporary faculty housing.

Significance:

An imposing Mediterranean Revival mansion built by a prosperous and influential descendent of an early missionary family: Walter F. Dillingham. For more than four decades a great social center of the Hawaiian Islands; many prominent visitors were entertained here.

PHYSICAL HISTORY

Date of Construction:

1921.

"Retrospect for 1921...Among the noted additions of the year is the W. F. Dillingham villa, on the slope of the Leahi overlooking the park, to cost \$150,000, nearing completion".

Thomas G. Thrum, Comp. & Pub., Hawaiian Annual
for 1922, Honolulu, 1921, p. 164.

Architect:

David Adler, FAIA, Chicago (1882-1949). See Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, Biographical Dictionary of Architects (Deceased), Los Angeles, 1956, pp 10-11.

Origin of Design:

"Many people have had the idea that La Pietra is a copy of my aunt's villa in Florence of the same name, the one in which Mr. Dillingham and I were married, but such is not the case", said Mrs. Dillingham. "It is a composite of several of the beautiful villas in Florence to which my aunt, Mrs. Acton, took me. The facade facing the Waianae Mountains and the town is copied from the Villa Cambreia. The facade facing the Koolau Mountains is a replica of the de Medici villa in Florence. Our architect was David Adler, and he beautifully combined and coordinated the designs and ideas we loved..."

Grace Tower Warren, "Island Hostess: An Italian Villa in Hawaii", Paradise of the Pacific, Vol. 63, No. 5, May, 1951, pp 38-39.

Plans:

A few sheets of blueprints are reported to exist, but a recent search by the Dillingham Corporation failed to locate them.

Additions and Alterations:

According to Mrs. Charles F. Weeber of Honolulu (who lived next door and knew the place well from 1923) many minor changes and additions were made through the years (Dr. Weeber's present address: 1434 Punahou Street, Honolulu).

Historical Events:

Many of the prominent visitors entertained at La Pietra through the years are mentioned in the Warren article referred to above. The writer was a guest at the house several times in the period 1945-1963.

Likely Sources of Further Information:

Honolulu newspapers and surviving friends of the Dillinghams.



Prepared by Charles E. Peterson, FAIA
332 Spruce Street
Philadelphia, Pa. 19106

For Columbia University School of Architecture

September, 1967

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Architectural Interest and Merit:

An extensive two-story "Italian villa" in an imposing terraced setting overlooking Kapiolani Park, Waikiki Bay and Honolulu; an example of the "Mediterranean Revival" period which had some popularity in Honolulu, as on the mainland.

Condition of Fabric:

Good - but needs minor repairs, especially the plumbing. Maintenance probably neglected because the building is threatened with demolition.

DESCRIPTION OF EXTERIOR

Number of Stories and Layout:

Two stories arranged in a hollow square 87'-2"x 101'-5" plus service wing 99'-5"x 22'.

Wall construction:

Said to be blue or volcanic stone (furred on the inside) sand float plaster finish, the whole painted pink.

Structural System:

Wooden joists are revealed in one place.

Patio:

Main feature is a central rectangular patio 53'-1" x 54'-2" lined on four sides with arcades (7'-9" wall face to outer column face) supported on cut sandstone doric columns. Concrete cantilevered stairway with iron railing to second floor on north side of patio.

Chimnies:

Two - one serving the kitchen.

Doorways and Doors:

Doorways and windows trimmed with stucco in imitation of cut stone. Doors generally double-leaved glazed or solid. They let out onto terraces, balconies and loggias.

Windows:

Generally casement windows with light green slat shutters.

Roof:

Low pitch hip roof covered with semi-circular red ceramic ("Spanish") tiles.

Wide-projecting eaves, displaying large-dimension "rafters" with shaped ends and board soffits with painted decorations.

Dormers, Cupolas, Towers:

None.

INTERIOR DESCRIPTIONMain Entrance Stair Hall:

Double doors open into stairhall 17'-3" x 19'-8" paved with ceramic tiles. Stairway: cast stone steps with wrought iron railing leads to main and second floors.

Flooring: ceramic tiles. Plain white plaster walls and ceilings.

Living Room called "The Gallery"

Size: 21'-11" x 52'-3". Plaster "vaulted" ceiling. Floor of reddish brown herringbone ceramic tiles, each 6" x 9". Double glazed doors to main terrace and to patio. Three double doors (veneer finish) to other rooms.

Dining Room:

Size: 20'-0" x 28'-1". Plastered walls, furred. Open beam ceiling. Flooring: terrazzo. Doorways and doors: three French doors leading to long balcony over the front entrance door. Panelled walnut doors. Plaster trim.

Upstairs Rooms: these are not notable in any way. They contain minimum of trim but with much built-in shelving. Flooring: narrow hardwood floors.

Miscellaneous:

There are no notable hardware or lighting fixtures. There are some elaborate wrought-iron gates.

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

Landscaping, Walks and Enclosures:

The approach from Diamond Head road to the house is by Poni Moi Road. The driveway enters the grounds and is lined with stone walls, clipped hedges and night-blooming cereus.

The house occupies a long terrace 133' deep behind a 14' parapet wall of volcanic stone. To the left of the house is a level "bowling green" of grass 73' x 175' enclosed by concrete and stone walls. There are niches for statues, most of which are now gone. A second terrace behind the house, 6' to 9' high, plus balustrade, accommodates a swimming pool and a tennis court. The whole is attractively landscaped with tropical trees and shrubs and lawns. At least one of the three original gardeners still works on the place.

Near the entrance gates a stone wellhead with a wrought-iron frame has been damaged, possibly by vandals.

The slopes of Diamond Head behind are dry and spiny. All landscaping is artificial and made possible by the city water supply.



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